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QUANTUM COLLISIONS COMMENTS ON THE FIRST INTRODUCTION TO FRANÇOIS LARUELLE'S NON-STANDARD

GENERICSCIENCE, LEXICON,
PHILOFICTION

NON-LARUELLE, NON-PHILOSOPHY, PHILOSOPHIE NON-STANDARD, QUANTUM
COLLISIONS

1) ENTER THE MATRIX

"You are entering a zone of "non-philosophy"... For you the philosopher it is a knowledge-collider, for you the physicist it is a conceptual maze – you are in the Matrix" (first sentence, PHILOSOPHIE NON-STANDARD, 7, my translation). The "Matrix" is Laruelle's name for what Deleuze and Guattari call the rhizome. In this specific matrix, philosophy and science are freed of their respective sufficiency principles and made available as material for new encounters.

2) QUANTUM INDETERMINATION vs DETERMINATION IN THE LAST INSTANCE

"the axioms of this work are often beyond immediate comprehension of its utterances and force the reader...to explain to himself what he has read or written, and which no doubt cannot always be deduced from them, i.e. to extend it by a new invention" (PHILOSOPHIE NON-STANDARD, 14).

The "axioms" of non-standard philosophy give rise to new utterances that are derived therefrom both deductively and non-deductively, giving rise to the need to "explain to oneself" the utterances encountered and/or produced. These explanations are part of the process of the book itself, which extends both non-philosophy and its own content more freely than classical or sufficient logic would allow. Such non-deductive chains are part of a quantum hermeneutic rather than a textual one.

This approach is based on a quantum temporality which takes precedence over the more familiar mechanical marxist temporality of "determination in the last instance", which as future anterior is insufficiently futural – precisely because it involves projecting a future "last instance" that is backward-looking (this is the sense of the "future perfect"). The obsessive ritualistic repetition of the vocable "determination in the last instance" does not suffice to give it any existence as a concept, and even less to give it intellectual plausibility. Laruelle's liberation of quantum-thinking from mathematical sufficiency means giving primacy to indetermination over even such attenuated, because pseudo-futural, forms of determination.

3) QUANTISING VS RELIGIONISING: THE QUANTUM CHRIST IS MORE QUANTUM THAN CHRIST

We are in the matrix, we must explain the work by extending it, we read and think in terms of a quantum hermeneutics. That is to say the borders of the text do not imprison us, we are directly related to the outside. A purely internal reading is based on a relativistic ontology of axiomatic and referential closure. In Laruelle's text there is no primacy of determination nor of determinism. There is no "boundary" determinate enough to stop our movements of thought. In the writing of this text, "there was no question of determinist discursivity, of a linear chain of reasons, or of analysis and synthesis for an experiment which is more of the order of a wager or of a throw of the dice" (PHILOSOPHIE NON-STANDARD, 8). Further, "each titled paragraph is often a new throw of the dice and a new beginning, the text as a whole can seem like a kaleidoscope of renewed fractal views of our problem. This is to say that a certain degree of aleatory reading is possible...even recommended" (8).

As in A THOUSAND PLATEAUS we are invited to place one passage in relation with a more distant one. Given the axiom of non-(en)closure this more "distant" passage can be taken from outside the text itself. Hence the later transition to ANTI-BADIOU and to CHRISTO-FICTION. The asymmetry between Badiou and Christ, in Laruelle's treatment of them, is not an absolute given. Laruelle could have given a more "charitable" reading of Badiou by quantising him further, just as he could have given a less charitable reading of Christ by religionising him further.

4) CONCEPTUAL COLLISION AS ESCAPE FROM THE HELL OF PHILOSOPHY

Laruelle cites a maxim from René Daumal: "the human being is a superposition of vicious circles", and gives a quantum acception to the term "superposition". The implication is that quantum phenomena are not necessarily and automatically positive. In this

case, the superposition of vicious circles delimits a closed space, that Laruelle calls "hell", stating: "the human struggles in these circles of hell and strives to free himself" (PHILOSOPHIE NON-STANDARD, 9).

It is interesting to note that the expression that I have translated as "struggles" is a reflexive verb "se débat", one could almost translate "the human debates (or disputes) itself". For Laruelle philosophy under the rule of the principle of sufficiency is Hell.

Yet this infernal superposition is still quantum and cannot definitively delimit, enclose, and contain any content. Quantum "leakage" can and does occur, even in Hell. Similarly, one must remember that in Deleuze and Guattari's expression "ligne de fuite", the word "fuite" means flight or escape, but also leakage. In other words, despite Laruelle's critique of Deleuze (a critique that Deleuze himself had already made of his own work prior to his collaboration with Guattari) there is a quantum communality between them.

Laruelle and Deleuze agree on the need to go outside, to escape from Hell, and they also agree on the immanent means. "There is only one way of getting outside the circles of Hell, and that is to transform them by their collision into means of escape, not to climb up the interior of a Platonic chimney but to cross the ford by leaping from one rock to another" (ibid, 9). Superposition is not enough, we need transformation by experimental collision and escape by quantum leap. "We are searching for a collider of concepts" (13). Philosophical worlds must be rendered porous.

5) QUANTUM THOUGHT: PLURALIST HEURISTIC vs CHRISTO-REDUCTION

Many of those who find Laruelle's non-philosophy interesting would be willing to espouse the indetermination and the quantum leap into non-standard philosophy if it were not for the Christic obstacle, i.e. Laruelle's obsessive reformulation of quantum insights in a Christ-oriented language. However, it would be a mistake to reject Laruelle's "Christo-fiction", which is far less religious than reductive (religionist) readings of his texts would have us believe.

Laruelle explicitly condemns the natural attitude of sufficiency that is associated with the reductive constitution of simple classical universes, giving rise not only to scientism but also to the equally reductionist primacy given to politics, to religion or to aesthetics. In this sense, "sufficiency" is very similar to Badiou's notion of "suture". Thus we can speak of the dangers not only of scientism, but also of politicism, religionism and aestheticism: "The conditions of intellectual experiment are here no longer the classical ones, where the subject was naturally plunged into the relatively simple universes, after all, of philosophy, science, religion, and art" (PHILOSOPHIE NON-STANDARD, 8).

One must bear in mind that the author of non-marxism did not stop there, but went on to write a quantum trilogy, comprising PHILOSOPHIE NON-STANDARD, ANTI-BADIOU, and CHRISTO-FICTION. Laruelle's analysis of the various reductive "principles of sufficiency" (sufficiency is not only philosophical and mathematical, but also artistic, theological, and political) identifies them as the source of the normative evaluations associated with the various reductionisms.

Outside such a normative principle there can be no obligation to adopt Quantum or Christic or democratic thinking, or their inverse. However, to attain the quantum it is best to also get the relativity correct, which is something that I do not think that Laruelle always succeeds in doing, much less his disciples. In particular, the religionist reduction of Laruelle's thought in English has been a hindrance to its possible understanding and wider reception.

6) QUANTUM THOUGHT SUSPENDS THE BARRIERS BETWEEN REGIONAL ONTOLOGIES

In his search for a quantum thought Laruelle wants to free the quantum mode of thinking from its mathematical expression, that he finds reductive. Mathematical expressions such as Schrödinger's equation come from a moment of return to order (which of course is necessary and desirable) but Niels Bohr often used a more intuitive strategy of thought (influenced by Kierkegaard), declaring that an exclusively mathematical approach would be too limiting and premature. I think that Laruelle is trying to capture the quantum heuristic behind its mathematical formulation.

Laruelle explains that non-philosophy does not try to comment on or to influence quantum theory as a regional ontology. "Given its very special object, it [i.e. non-philosophy] will have to bend itself to a difficult exercise, one scandalous both for the physicists: using quantum schemas without mathematical sufficiency, and for the philosophers: using philosophical schemas without their sufficiency" (PHILOSOPHIE NON-STANDARD, 13).

In his escape from simple classical universes, Laruelle's quantum thought is in part an answer to Badiou's declaration that we are at the end of the age of the poets: not so for Laruelle. Science and poetry (and also religion) can be freed of their sufficiency and made to collide in the particle accelerator of non-standard philosophy.

7) "DETERMINATION IN THE LAST INSTANCE" IS NEITHER DETERMINATE, NOR LAST, NOR AN INSTANCE

Determination in the last instance must not be understood philosophically as some sort of ultimate determinist foundation. It is an underdetermination, what Laruelle calls an "under-foundation". The "under" here does not mean a deeper even more foundational level, but that the determination in the last instance is less determinate and more generic than any foundation. As it is "generic" it is not in fact an instance, nor does it come "after" anything at all, so it is not "last" in any temporal or even logical sense. In quantum terms it is to be translated as "indetermination in the pre-prior genericity".

8) THE LAST INSTANCE IS "BEFORE-THE-FIRST"

"The Last Instance is a pre-priority, a before-first instance but which conserves its priority, become determinate, to philosophy" (PHILOSOPHIE NON-STANDARD, 79).

The Last Instance can only be understood in terms of genericity and of quantity, i.e. in terms of under-determination and of indetermination. Strictly, the "last" instance is pre-primary. It is only in closed, simple, classical universes that "determination in the last instance" takes on the meaning of determinism. Laruelle's non-standard philosophy is a democratic thought, in which freedom has (pre-)primacy. This is the lesson of his "quantum deconstruction".

9) QUANTUM DECONSTRUCTION HAS PRIMACY

Laruelle talks of quantum deconstruction as opposed to relativistic textual deconstruction, which he assigns to the more sophisticated versions of the macroscopic apprehension of classical universes. Thus he talks about philosophy as light, founded on transparency or vision without interaction, which corresponds to such a macroscopic apprehension of light.

In his talk about the "conciliation between science and philosophy under generic conditions" (PHILOSOPHIE NON-STANDARD, 72) Laruelle maintains a certain ambiguity about primacy, as he wants both to keep a scientific reference and to de-mathematicise scientific notions such as the quantum, in order to turn them into stylistic approaches rather than retaining them as substantial functions. So there is a transfer of meaning here, but Laruelle claims that this is not metaphor. One way of explaining his position would be to say that it is rather the mathematisation that is metaphorical, as the style of thought came first. This would be to claim that science in the making, or science as generic, has primacy (or what he calls "pre-priority") whereas the function (whether mathematically expressed or not) belongs to determinate sciences or to science made.

10) LARUELLE'S DELEUZIAN UNDULATION: DELEUZE DOES NOT EXIST (AS A PARTICLE)

"There is only one way to escape from the circles of Hell, and that is to transform them by their collision into means of escape" (PHILOSOPHIE NON-STANDARD, 11).

When Laruelle does not talk about Deleuze's philosophy directly this allows it to permeate all his work as a Deleuzian undulation. When Laruelle refers to Deleuze explicitly he is transformed into a particle and rejected.

In this quote from the first introduction we see the Deleuzian tenor of Laruelle's non-standard philosophy, Laruelle's "Hell" by superposition of closed circles is the equivalent of Deleuze and Guattari's "Black Hole", itself a construct of superposition. There is the same desire to escape from such enclosure and the same means are employed: transformation by collision and undulation (Laruelle), or by encounter and variation (Deleuze).

Laruelle accuses Deleuze of employing a method of "lazy, scholastic, and academic trampling of the past" as a "technique for leading philosophy to the nostalgia of its end" (9), the very thing that Deleuze constantly denounced and fought against. He presents as his own method the "procedure of the continuous transformation of problems" (9), the same method that Deleuze advocated and practiced.

Over and over we see Laruelle's massive indebtedness to Deleuze combined with a fierce and damning critique. Laruelle famously said in an interview "Laruelle does not exist", to refute accusations of solipsistic mastery. The conclusion that we may draw is that Deleuze too does not exist. But even this affirmation was borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari's RHIZOME, where they declare that their own existence is not a determinate state of affairs: "Not a matter of reaching the point where one no longer says I, but the point where saying I or not no longer has any importance".

11) AGAINST THE FANTASM OF DIFFICULTY: THE "PARADOX OF NON-PHILOSOPHY"

Overturning Plato's élitist "Let noone ignorant of geometry enter here", Laruelle democratically declares "Anyone who is ignorant of geometry can enter here" (10), but warns that they must "be ready to meet a formalism that is conceptual rather than mathematical". Such a "conceptual formalism" is to be met without fear, and we are invited to "let go at the very heart of the work" (10, italics in the original) and to "stop fantasising over the difficulties".

One of the fantasmatic difficulties or hindrances to understanding Laruelle's texts comes from "the more or less new use of traditional vocabularies" (9). These vocabularies have been divested of the organising principle of philosophical sufficiency and made available for new uses. The guiding principle for their "non-standard" interpretation and use is that of radical immanence, pedagogically elucidated by means of an inventive, democratic and probabilistic (but de-mathematised or de-geometrised) thinking in terms of waves rather than by means of a nostalgic, aristocratic and mechanistic thinking in terms of particles and points. This is what Laruelle calls the "paradox of non-philosophy". The aim is the simplicity of lived openness, but in order to combat closed thinking and living a certain degree of semantic complexity is necessary:

"In order to rid itself of philosophical sufficiency ... it must mobilise a whole complex ... apparatus, make its operations visible by a type of precision entirely other than the phenomenological" (10). We cannot, Laruelle warns us, dissolve our problems easily and quickly by mere contemplation, we need to arrange conceptual collisions, but only by letting go and "floating".

12) LARUELLE'S QUANTUM HERMENEUTICS

Can the principle of sufficiency of a discipline be overcome from within that discipline? Laruelle's critique of the principle of philosophical sufficiency, his non-philosophy, seemed to come from a position outside philosophy, only retroactively did he understand that he was not situated in some radical other to philosophy, but was operating on the basis of "non-standard" philosophy. "Non-" is not the same as "exo-", nor "ex-". Laruelle calls Badiou "philo-rigid". (Note: This echoes the recurrent critique of various public figures, famously the socialist candidate Lionel Jospin before the Presidential elections of 2002, as "psycho-rigid").

Laruelle contrasts Badiou's set theoreticism with his own quantum approach. But this limits his critique to the Badiou of BEING AND EVENT. The Badiou of LOGICS OF WORLDS makes use of category theory, and so has "quantised" himself. Sometimes Badiou still appeals to set theory as a unique foundational level of thought. But this is not always the case. This set theoretical exceptionalism and foundationalism is less and less a trait of his pronouncements as Badiou deepens and extends his reflexion.

If Laruelle can "quantise" Christ he should also quantise Deleuze, who he continues to reduce to philosophical sufficiency, despite his own debt to Deleuze's thought. The same applies to Laruelle's treatment of Badiou, where he contrasts Badiou's set theoreticism and his own quantum thought. Laruelle should also search the qualitative, or even "quantum", aspects of Badiou's thought. This is a very serious failing in Laruelle's application of his own ideas.

De-objectifying sets, as Badiou now does in LOGICS OF WORLDS, by rendering them local is a step towards greater genericity. Laruelle is himself "philo-rigid" in his readings of potential rivals, such as Deleuze and Badiou. Laruelle's auto-critique of his previous scientism is in effect an acknowledgement of his own continuing philo-rigidity.

The principle of mathematical sufficiency that Laruelle invokes as a form of reductionism lets us envision 2 ways of overcoming sufficiency: an external overcoming from some outside, as Laruelle formerly hinted was his own path for overcoming philosophical sufficiency, and an internal overcoming, from the inside (even if the nature of this inside undergoes substantive revision) as Laruelle maintains now with his non-standard philosophy. The same twofold path may be seen in mathematics, where sufficiency may be overcome externally by metaphoric extrapolation, which is Laruelle's path, or by internal relativisation and extension, in the constitution for example of nonstandard mathematical theories.

Laruelle must now decide between clinging to his former "philo-rigid" style, still prevalent in his non-philosophy, and embracing a new "philo-undulatory" style, as called for by his more recent "non-standard" philosophy, which will force him to abandon or to transform a lot of his former certainties. In particular, his reading of Badiou, which is brilliant in its polemical clarifications, is itself philo-rigid and needs to be complemented by a more undulatory hermeneutics.

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